

On the 2nd of November 1981, some boys pulled down a tailor bird's nest with two chicks from a Tagar (*Ervatamia coronaria*, Stapf) bush near a building about 500 metres away from Dr. Salvi's garden. There are three lanes and eight buildings in between these two places. The boys brought this nest with the chicks which looked about a week old, to us. Not knowing what to do, we tied this nest with the chicks in it, at the same place in the *Gardenia* tree, where the tailor birds had been found nesting last year.

We kept watch on the nest and to our

surprise and pleasure, found that the birds took interest in these chicks. Initially they watched the chicks from close quarters. Next day we found that the pair had adopted these orphaned chicks and both male and female were feeding them with insects.

Unfortunately the next day, one of the chicks was found dead due to an unknown cause. The pair however continued to look after the remaining chick successfully. On the 11th day both the foster parents were seen teaching it to fly and after two days the bird embarked on its first solo flight.

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10. COMMUNAL USE OF VILLAGE PONDS BY THE MUGGER CROCODILE (*CROCODYLUS PALUSTRIS*), CATTLE AND MAN

(With a plate)

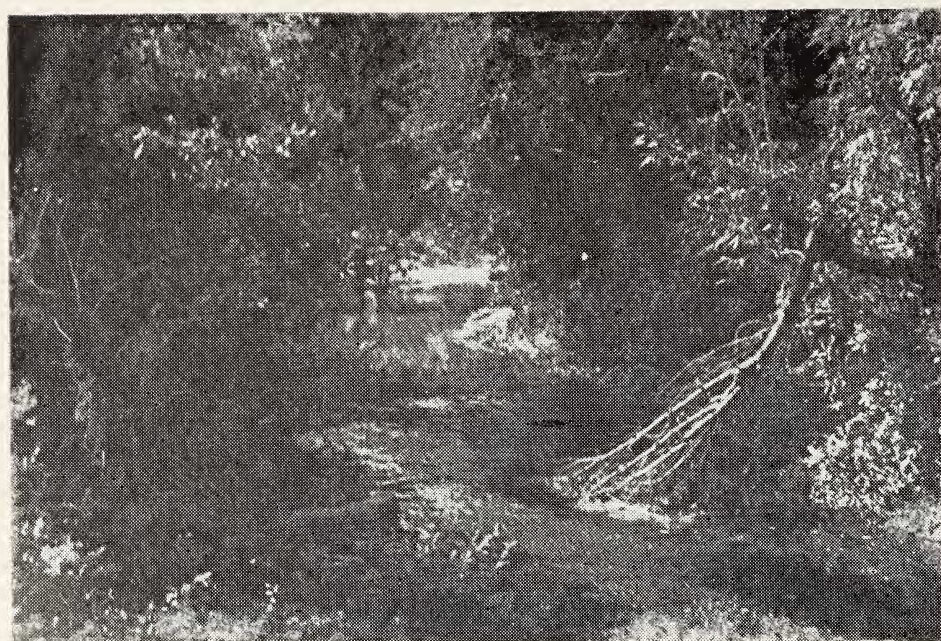
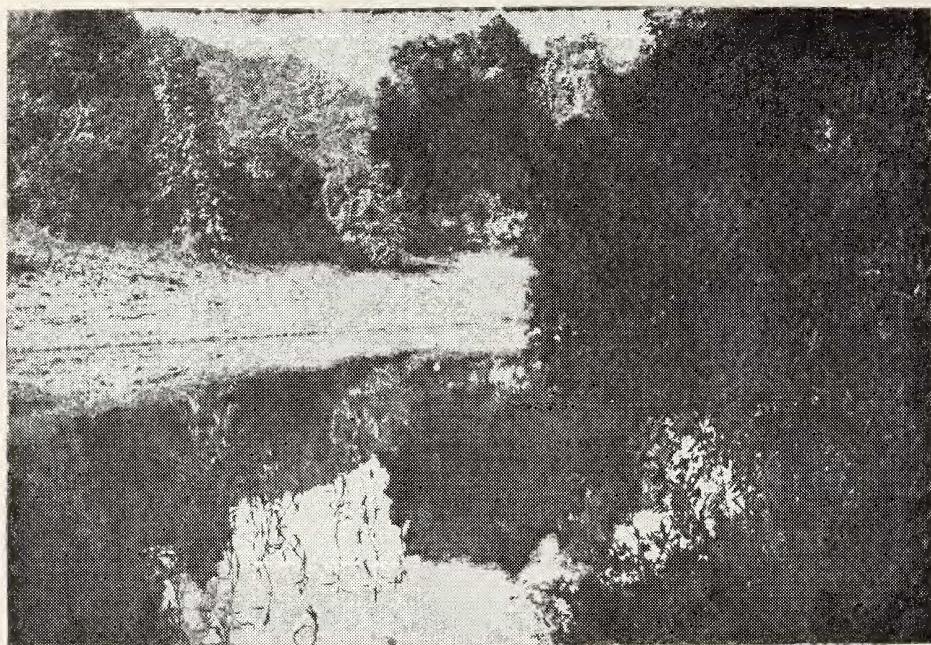
INTRODUCTION

In contradiction to the common and unauthenticated belief, there are several instances in record indicating that the mugger (*C. palustris*) is a docile crocodile, leading, when allowed to do so, a friendly and peaceful coexistence with both cattle and man.

Bustard (1974) and Whitaker (1974) mentioned about the mugger's coexistence at the Killikudu reservoir in Tamilnadu. Acharjyo and Mohapatra (1978) have recorded that a mugger which escaped from the Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa stayed in the zoo's lake which, at its periphery, is used by villagers and their cattle.

Further evidence of the innocuous nature

of the species is provided by the various accounts of crocodile worship (B. C. Choudhury, pers comm., Guggisberg 1972, Singh, L.A.K., in lit.) where mugger worship is often symbolised as a sign of veneration to Goddess Ganga or God Vishnu. The most remarkable were the mugger of 'Mugger Pir' in Pakistan. Andrew Leith Adams (1860), giving an account of the Mugger Pir wrote, "... The largest crocodile lives in a long, narrow tank separated from the others. The Fakirs and natives who worship in the neighbouring temples had painted his forehead red — they venerate the monster, making a salamn to his majesty whenever he shows himself above water...". It should be noted that the mug-



Above: The village pond at Beherasahi during April (Case I)
Below: One of the two connections of the above pond with the River Mahanadi.

ger had allowed the people to paint his forehead red with vermilion.

The following account records three instances where since 1975 mugger crocodiles have lived in peaceful coexistence in village ponds after entering these during floods from the River Mahanadi, and another instance where the mugger took refuge in cow-sheds during the flood.

CASE HISTORIES

Case I.

On 13 October 1977 I confirmed the presence of a mugger, about 1.5 m long, in a tank near village Beherasahi on the eastern bank of the Satkoshia Gorge of River Mahanadi, about 19 km upstream from the foot of the gorge.

During the dry season the tank is about 130 m in length and 22 m in width with maximum water depth of about 1.5 m. In the rainy season the size of the tank is almost doubled and the depth increases to 2.5 m. The tank is separated from the river by a 16 m wide river bank plus a low lying valley, about 100 m wide, and then the bank of the tank, a further 10 m wide. During the flood, water flows from the river through the valley and the tank. Following the flood, however, the valley becomes dry although a slow stream may still be connecting the tank with the river at the lower end even until May.

Following complaints from the villagers to remove the mugger from the tank as the tank was used by cattle and the mugger was "eating away" all the fish in the tank, several unsuccessful attempts were made to catch the mugger. The tank was also used by the villagers to take bath during the monsoon and the immediate post-monsoon periods. They noticed that the mugger remained away from

the bathing ghat, didn't do any harm to goats and other small cattle, and was rather shy, always entering the water when people came to the bathing ghat. Thus the mugger was allowed to remain in the tank. Later it became fun for the cowherds to watch it from a distance and report to us when we went there. In the beginning people were afraid of entering the tank to fish, but later they did not mind the presence of the mugger and freely netted. Everytime, of course, they expected to catch the mugger too and present it to us to return to the river. In the first week of May 1978 the mugger left the tank, probably during the night, to be later seen in the river.

During its seven months stay in the tank the mugger was never a threat to any of the animals using the tank, or bathing children. On one occasion the mugger permitted me to approach slowly to within two metres to take a photograph. Once it was reported that the mugger had attempted to attack a small monkey when the latter had lowered its head to drink.

Case II.

During the same year another juvenile mugger, also of about 1.5 m in length, had entered a swamp in village Chhamundia, about 15 km downstream from the foot of the Satkoshia Gorge, along the western bank. This swamp is by the side of a stream connecting the river to the catchment area of a range of distant hills. During dry season the swamp is about 50 m from the stream and 100 m from the river. Then it is about 200 m in length and 150 m in width holding water of about 2 m deep. The swamp is greatly disturbed by cattle and man, there being much fishing activity. During rains the swamp is connected to a small village pond, 60 x 50 x 2 m, situated